

Taking Care of a Sick Person

Houston Department of
Health and Human Services



Novel H1N1 influenza (formerly known as swine flu) can cause a wide range of symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with nH1N1 influenza. Like seasonal flu, nH1N1 influenza in humans can vary in severity from mild to severe. Severe disease with pneumonia, respiratory failure and even death is possible with nH1N1 influenza. Certain groups might be more likely to develop a severe illness from nH1N1 influenza, such as pregnant women and persons with chronic medical conditions. Sometimes bacterial infections may occur at the same time as or after infection with influenza viruses and lead to pneumonia, ear infection, or sinus infections.

How Flu Spreads

The main way that influenza viruses are thought to spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. Influenza viruses may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands.



People with nH1N1 influenza who are cared for at home should:

- Check with their health care provider about any special care they might need if they are pregnant or have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema
- Check with their health care provider about whether they should take antiviral medications
- Keep away from others as much as possible. This is to keep from making others sick. Do not go to work or school while ill
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone, except to seek medical care or for other necessities (Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- Get plenty of rest
- Drink clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants) to keep from being dehydrated
- Cover coughs and sneezes. Clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often and especially after using tissues and after coughing or sneezing into hands
- Be watchful for emergency warning signs (see below) that might indicate you need to seek medical attention.

Steps to Lessen the Spread of Flu in the Home

CDC recommends when providing care to a household member who is sick with influenza, the most important ways to protect yourself and others who are not sick are to:

- Keep the sick person away from other people as much as possible especially others who are at high risk for complications from influenza
- Remind the sick person to cover coughs and clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often, especially after coughing and/or sneezing
- Have everyone in the household clean their hands often, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. Children may need reminders or help keeping their hands clean
- Ask your health care provider if household contacts of the sick person—particularly those contacts who may be pregnant or have chronic health conditions—should take antiviral medications such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or zanamivir (Relenza®) to prevent the flu
- If you are in a high risk group for complications from influenza, you should attempt to avoid close contact (within 6 feet) with household members who are sick with influenza. If close contact with a sick individual is unavoidable, consider wearing a facemask or respirator, if available and tolerable. Infants should not be cared for by sick family members.



For more information, please visit www.HoustonH1N1.org